

The usual suspects: Identifying serial offenders and their crimes

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Research conducted by psychologists at the University of Leicester and by Northamptonshire Police has found that criminals have their own distinctive 'local haunts' when committing crime.

It seems that robbers, burglars and car thieves have specific geographical areas that they favour when committing crime and that these are relatively unique from one offender to the next. By identifying these locations, it is hoped that the police will be better placed to identify the person responsible and subsequently catch them.

In a recent study, PhD student Matthew Tonkin and his collaborators Professor Ray Bull, Dr Emma Palmer and Dr John Bond have found that car thieves, burglars and robbers in the Northamptonshire area tend to commit their offences over relatively small geographical areas. These 'local haunts' are distinctive from one offender to the next. The findings suggest that, when the police are faced with unsolved crimes, they may be able to identify which crimes are the work of the same person simply by looking at where the offences were committed and the distance between the offence sites.

Mr Tonkin said:

"Our research is one of several studies conducted around the world that demonstrate the importance of offender spatial behaviour. So, the locations of crime aren't just an irrelevant consequence of crime; they can tell us very important information about who is responsible and

which crimes are the work of the same person.

"Crucially, however, our study shows that these findings extend across different types of crime, whereas previous work has looked at crimes, such as burglary, robbery and car theft, separately."

By extending these findings across different types of crime, this research has shown that the 'local haunts' favoured by offenders when committing crime are not different depending on the type of crime. Instead of offenders having different areas that they favour for committing burglaries, car thefts and robberies, it seems that they commit all of their offences in similar areas.

Scientific Support Manager at Northamptonshire Police Dr John Bond-who is a researcher with the University of Leicester's Forensic Research Centre - said, "We are really pleased to be involved in this ground breaking research that will hopefully provide the [police](#) service with additional ways of detecting crime".

This research is being presented to the public at the University of Leicester on June 24.

Provided by University of Leicester

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